



**Using
The Respiratory Competence
Assessment Tool
(R-CAT)**

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A. The Respiratory Health and Well-being Service Framework (RHWSF) Respiratory Competence Assessment Tool (R-CAT) for Nursing Care and Management

This competence framework was originally developed by an expert reference group (ERG) consisting of nurses with expertise in respiratory care, practicing in Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts, Independent and Voluntary Sectors, and local Education Providers. The work was carried out in partnership with the Northern Ireland Practice and Education Council (NIPEC) and has been reviewed on two occasions. The Respiratory Competence Assessment Tool (R-CAT) was last reviewed by the ERG and updated in March 2020.

The RCAT is underpinned by a number of documents relative to respiratory care and nursing based on learning needs arising from the Respiratory Health and Well-being Service Framework (RHWSF) standards for service delivery. To find out more about how R-CAT was developed and validated, go to:

https://nipec.hscni.net/download/projects/previous_work/highstandards_practice/respiratory_project/RHWSF-final-report.pdf

The respiratory assessment competency tools can be accessed via the NIPEC website at <https://nipec.hscni.net/resource-section/r-cat-documents/> and can be completed online by registering for the NIPEC e-Portfolio at <https://nipecportfolio.hscni.net/> or by printing off a hard copy at <https://nipec.hscni.net/updated-respiratory-competence-assessment-tool-r-cat/>

The following information will guide you on how to use the competency assessment tools to assess your level of competence and any learning needs.

B. What is R-CAT?

The R-CAT has been developed on the basis of three assumptions, namely, that all nurses and midwives have:

- competence at the point of registration within a range of skill sets
- varying levels of competence in a range of skill sets that have been achieved through post-registration experience and development opportunities
- accountability to act within the Nursing and Midwifery Council Code: standards of conduct, performance and ethics for nurses and midwives¹ (NMC, 2018¹).

This framework should help you build on skills you already have. It promotes a flexible approach to maintaining and developing competence in any clinical setting where you find yourself caring for patients with respiratory needs. It is made up of four domains:

1. Core Learning and Development.
2. Assessment and Monitoring Activities.
3. Technological Interventions.

¹ Nursing and Midwifery Council (2018) *The Code: Professional standards of practice and behaviour for nurses, midwives and nursing associates*. London, NMC

4. Health Promotion.

Each domain has a number of competencies relative to the care and management of patients with asthma, COPD or other respiratory conditions:

1. Core Learning and Development

1. Holistic assessment and diagnosis.
2. Management and monitoring of chronic relapsing respiratory disease
3. Communication.
4. Patient education and enhancing self-management.

2. Assessment and Monitoring Activities

1. Pulse oximetry.
2. Blood gases.
3. Peak Expiratory Flow Rate (PEFR).
4. Pulmonary Function Testing (PFT).
5. Allergy testing.

3. Technological Interventions

1. Inhalers.
2. Nebuliser therapy.
3. Oxygen therapy.
4. Non-Invasive Ventilation (NIV).
5. Adrenaline Auto-injectors

4. Health Promotion

1. Smoking cessation/prevention.
2. Exercise and Pulmonary Rehabilitation.

Each competency has a number of indicators against which you can assess your own competence. This helps you build a picture of how you are performing in your job and what your learning needs are.

R-CAT has been mapped to the Agenda for Change (AfC) Knowledge and Skills Framework (KSF) and you may find this useful as you prepare for your Annual Appraisal and Development Review (for those working within the HSC).

C. How Do I Use R-CAT?

In order to assess yourself, there are a number of processes you need to work through as outlined below.



D. Assessing Yourself Against R-CAT

D.1. What Tier am I?

First of all, you need to decide the frequency with which you come into contact to provide nursing care and interventions for people with respiratory conditions.

The level of contact you have through your job role will determine the level of knowledge and skills you require to deliver respiratory services to people with these needs.

For the purpose of this framework, this frequency has been broadly defined within three tiers:

Tier 1	Occasionally to commonly treat people with respiratory nursing care needs
Tier 2	Commonly to frequently treat people with respiratory nursing care needs
Tier 3	Dedicated practitioner

It is useful to note that whilst your Core Learning and Development (**Domain 1**) may be defined broadly within for example Tier 2, you may not require competence at Tier 2 for all other activities.

You should, however, be able to assess **Domain 1** – Core Learning and Development within one distinct tier.

You may want to ask a colleague, or your line manager, to help you decide the most appropriate tier of practice for some or all of the domains and competencies outlined.

D.2. How do I Assess Myself?

In order to assess your competence, you will need to work through *Domain 1: Core Learning and Development* first.

This is because there is a range of core knowledge, skills and attitudes which you need to have at the appropriate level to your tier, which are relevant to activities in the other domains.

This might mean that you work through the competency framework over a period of time, taking Domain 1 first and then other competence areas when you have completed learning needs within the Core Learning and Development Domain.

If you are practising at either Tier 2 or 3, it is assumed that you already have the required level of competence for the lower tiers.



Best Practice Tips:

Check your knowledge, skills and attitudes against those required for lower tiers before assessing your competence against what is needed for your own tier of practice.

To work through a competence area, take each indicator in turn and rate yourself against the following scale:

1. You need a lot of development.
2. You need some development.
3. You feel you are well developed.

You should assess ALL the indicators at the appropriate tier relative to your job role for each competence area.

Best Practice Tips:

Be honest with yourself – rate yourself realistically, even if you do require a lot of development. You may find it helpful to discuss this with your manager or with another colleague, for example during professional supervision.

You can, if you wish, ask different people to assess you using *R-CAT*. To do this, ask people in advance if they are happy to do this for you and then photocopy and give them the relevant pages to complete and return to you.

People you may want to approach might include:

- Your line manager
- Other nurses you work with
- Others e.g. colleagues you work with outside your organisation
- Other members of the multiprofessional team you work with.

This is commonly known as a 360° assessment.



E. Gathering Your Results

Having assessed yourself, you are ready to look at where your development needs are. To do this, you need to look at the Tier 1s and 2s you have scored and decide how you will meet your development needs.

Best Practice Tips:

Having assessments completed by other people will help you gather a true picture of your learning and development needs.

Try to select no more than two or three areas to focus on at any one time.

You may wish to take one competence area in a 4-6 week period and provide evidence for your learning as you acquire the knowledge, skills and attitudes you want to develop.

F. Planning for Your Learning and Development Needs

Once you have decided *what* you need to learn and develop, you need to plan *how* you are going to do that.

There are many ways you can do this. Meeting your learning and development needs can incorporate many types of flexible learning activities for example:

- supervised practice with a more experienced colleague
- formal learning programmes
- visits to another service area to observe practice or develop a specific area of competence
- working with an allied health professional to develop a specific area of competence
- completing an audit on an area of practice
- development of practice activities
- service development activities
- distance and e-learning activities.

For a more exhaustive list, and definitions of these and other learning activities, please visit: <https://nipecportfolio.hscni.net/>



It will be necessary for you to maintain a portfolio of learning and development to demonstrate that you have acquired the relevant knowledge and skills. This will include pieces of supporting evidence such as:

- supervision session records
- reflections on specific area of learning and development
- appraisal documentation
- reflections on action learning sets
- recorded learning from supervised practice
- records of learning arising from participation in audits
- reflections on reading journal articles
- critical incident analysis records
- certificates, diplomas or degrees achieved through formal learning processes
- documentation from project work.

Keeping a portfolio is useful to demonstrate your continuous professional development for e.g. revalidation requirements or for your personal development review/appraisal.

For more help with keeping a portfolio and how to reflect, go to:

<https://nipecportfolio.hscni.net/>

